

Dr. Kenniff, President Gregorian, members of the platform party, distinguished guests, and members of the Concordia community gathered here today,

I have great pleasure in presenting to you this morning, David J. Azrieli, Doctor of Laws, honoris causa, contributor of Concordia's first graduate fellowship, and the first benefactor in the history of our Library to create an endowment funding a major specialized collection. The David J. Azrieli Holocaust Collection--with its books, its journals, and its microfilmed manuscript records--documents the attempt by the Nazis and their collaborators to annihilate the Jews of Europe. The Azrieli Collection stands as a memorial to all of the victims of the Holocaust. And yet it is more than a static memorial, for it is also a major resource for researchers seeking to deepen our understanding of the scourge of genocide and to create more effective ways of fighting against genocides today.

Two weeks ago, Jews all over the world celebrated the festival of Succot, commemorating a time in the history of the children of Israel when they spent forty years wandering in the desert under the leadership of Moses and resided in succah, temporary shelters so frail that their inhabitants were frequently exposed to the full might of the elements. In a unique tradition marking this festival, a biblical injunction enjoins Jews to leave their houses for seven days

and to live in a hut deliberately left open to the elements, so that each generation will remember the bitter experience of oppression, the difficult return from exile, and the sweetness of the harvest in the land of Israel. Thus, one of Succot's major functions is to eternally embed in memory the symbolic meaning of the Exodus.

Primo Levi, a young Jew who survived Auschwitz, was perhaps thinking of all of us who live securely in our houses, when he wrote Shema, or Prayer, in 1946, as he struggled to confront the meaning of the Holocaust for future generations. Consider this excerpt from his poem:

You who live secure
In your warm houses,
Who return at evening to find
Hot food and friendly faces:

Consider whether this is a man,
Who labours in the mud
Who knows no peace
Who fights for a crust of bread
Who dies at a yes or a no.
Consider whether this is a woman,
Without hair or name
With no more strength to remember

Eyes empty and womb cold
As a frog in winter.

Consider that this has been:
I commend these words to you.
Engrave them on your hearts
When you are in your house, when you walk on your way,
When you go to bed, when you rise.
Repeat them to your children.

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In endowing the Holocaust Collection, David Azrieli has doubly advanced knowledge and memory: the memory of those who perished in the Holocaust and the memory of genocide in history. As Gustav Meyrink wrote:

When knowledge comes, memory come too, little by little.

Knowledge and memory are one and the same thing.

David, please step forward and help us to unveil the Library's plaque marking your important contribution.

Frank Chalk
Associate Professor of History
October 26, 1992